

BIZARRE BEYOND BELIEF

ARTS + CULTURE MAGAZINE  Issue #13



Buff Monster

BIAS OWN | Vladimir Kraynyk

SIMON BIRCH | OMEN514

Mural Festival | Malaysian Street Art

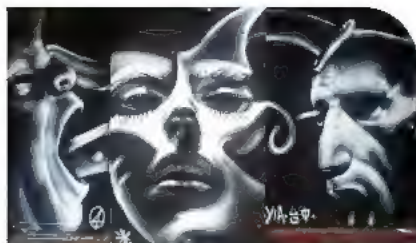
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BIZARRE BEYOND BELIEF

ARTS x CULTURE x MAGAZINE

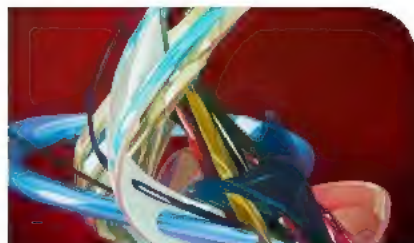
• ISSUE # 13

• CONTENT INFO •



OMEN-514

PAGE. 4



VLADIMIR KRAYNYK

PAGE. 16



BIAS OWN

PAGE. 32



MALAYSIAN STREETART

PAGE. 46



NYCHOS

PAGE. 56



SIMON BIRCH

PAGE. 68



BUFF MONSTER

PAGE. 82



MURAL FESTIVAL 2014

PAGE. 94



BATES

PAGE. 112

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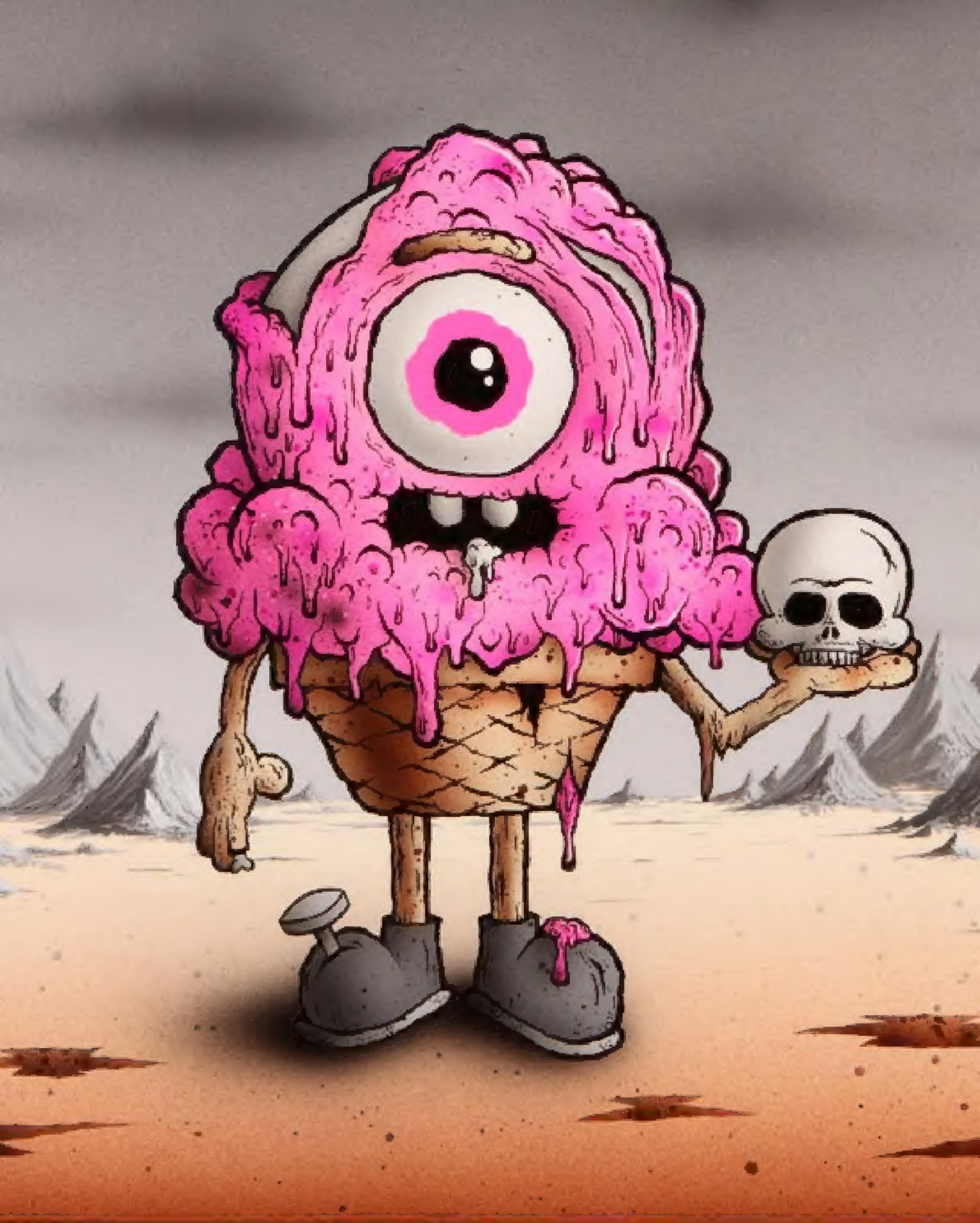
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Dedicated to the brilliant, beautiful and bizarre. Whimsical tales, visuals & various odds and ends about obscure and misunderstood sub-cultures.

* Cover photo by : MR. YOSHI



OMEN514

OMEN IS ONE OF THOSE DUDES THAT WE'VE BEEN WATCHING SINCE GETTING INVOLVED IN GRAFFITI WELL OVER A DECADE AGO. HE'S BEEN A LEGEND OUT IN MONTREAL (AND CANADA) FOR SO MANY YEARS AND IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE HE WILL BE SLOWING DOWN ANY TIME SOON. HIS STYLE IS UNIQUE AND PLEASANT, YET HOLDS A TON OF GRITTISS. WE'RE UNBELIEVABLY LUCKY TO HAVE HIM BE A PART OF OUR MAGAZINE AND WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT FUTURE PROJECT HE'LL COME UP WITH.







BizarreBeyondBelief: As a writer starting in the late 1990s, can you describe the graffiti scene at the time?

OMEN514: It was a blood bath free for all. Our city which is already the most corrupt in Canada was lazy too. There were few writers but we all knew each other because we had to buy paint at the same place, read the magazines at the same place, and talk shit at the same place. This place was called "Cellblock." Pre-internet we would have to see what the rest of the world was doing but we didn't want to waste money on magazines. It had to

go to paint.

BBB: How did the community receive the work being created?

OMEN514: The citizens HAAAATED it. We loved it. It was real graff then. Not just tags. There were block busters and throws and productions and huge roller tags. The hierarchy of graffiti was respected back then. I mean a throw up went over a tag, a piece went over a throw up and a production went over a piece. That was it.

BBB: How have you seen the graffiti

and street art landscape transform since you began painting?

OMEN514: For graffiti the definition of "getting up" has changed. There are no writers mentoring each other. Just fans and internet fame. Not real fame. It's fraudulent in that sense. People can paint a totally chill spots and pretend they are crushing it city wide. It's fucked. They don't even care about style. It's like getting up is the alpha and omega of the game. It is in some sense, just don't be proud of a piece of shit you put up just because you got balls. Street art and it's acceptance is new to me. A lot of





people in the street art scene aren't really street-artists but rather muralists. It's actually a better term. Murals have been around for as long as we have. I guess people need to feel safe and hear the word "art" before spending money to have a graffiti artist paint their wall. I feel I just paint and leave the terminology to the curators.

BBB: Considering the majority of graffiti artists tend to lean toward letter based pieces, what persuaded you to paint portrait based work?

OMEN514: I saw a ZILON piece and was like "WTF is that?"

Is that done with a can? And then it just stayed in my head. Then I was influenced by OTHER in the early days of painting when I finally did start to paint. We used to paint together for a long time and we kinda would talk about how there are enough words around that to just do one was kinda weird. I liked portraits and weird stuff from the beginning. I was always affected by "character" artists at time like TWIST, TOAST and SCRIBE to name a few.

BBB: As a graffiti and fine artist, how do you feel your approach differs between the two media?

OMEN514: When I paint fine art I keep my pinky up when I hold my can.

BBB: How would you describe the approach to a piece from concept to completion?

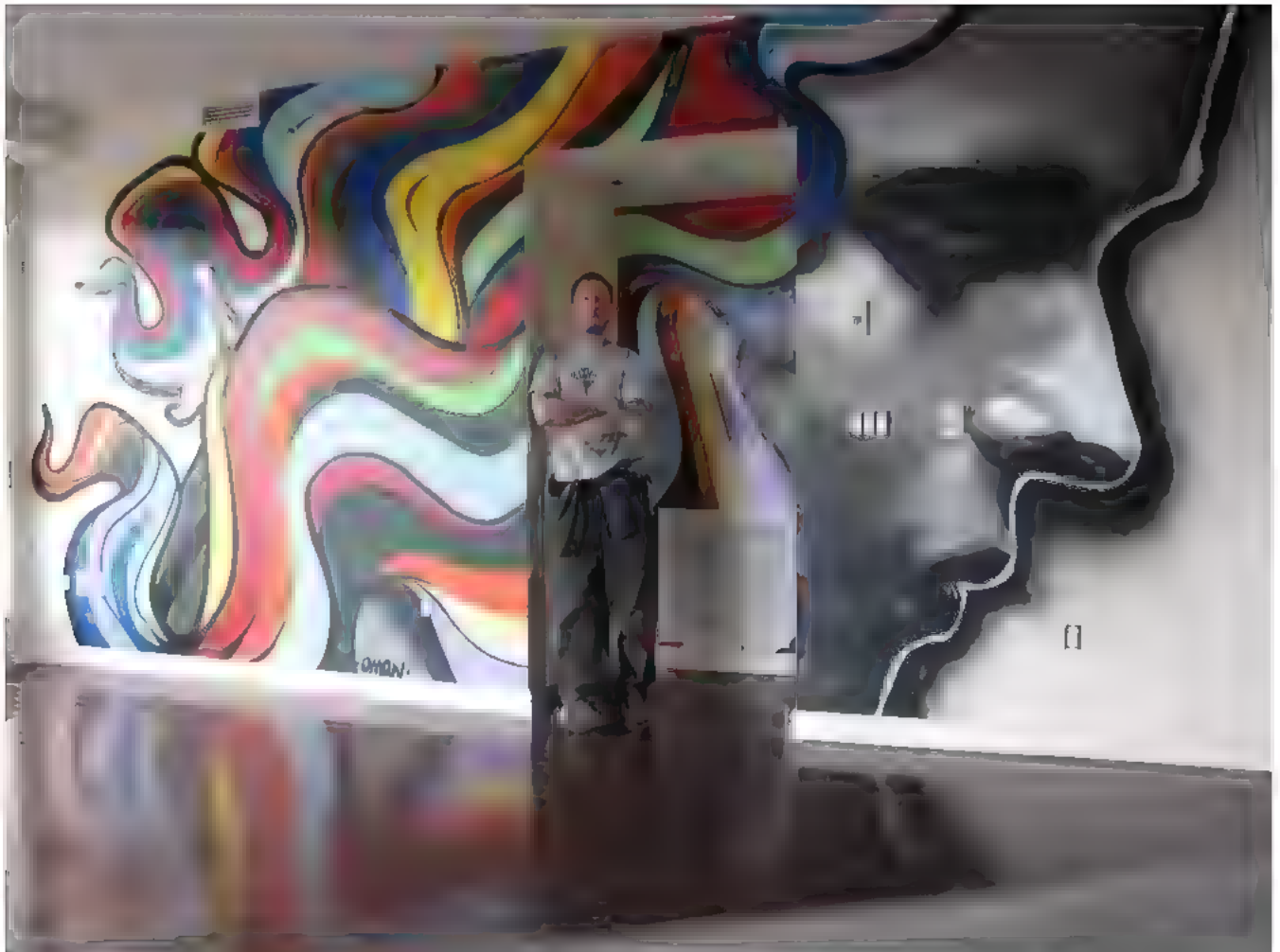
I like to get the essence of what I am painting and convey that and then all the other expression orbits around that. IT'S IN THE EYES MAAAN! Ha ha ha. I try to dominate the whole space so it has a complete feeling to it and so that no one can side bust my shit, ha ha!





“THERE ARE NO WRITERS MENTORING EACH OTHER.
JUST FANS AND INTERNET FAME. NOT REAL FAME.”





BBB: As an artist who uses primarily spray paint, why use spray paint as your primary medium as opposed to brushes?

OMEN514: Well I keep trying to push aerosol as a valid medium and it is kinda of my life ambition. I paint with aerosol better than with anything else so I have to educate people of it's unique traits. That's the initial goal, anyway. It's weird. People are obsessed that paint comes from a

can. OBSESSSED. It's acrylic or enamel. just like "acrylic and enamel hahaha. no one ever says" oil painting movement" I want it to be accepted until it is ignored. So that a painting done with aerosol can just be called abstract or pointillism or whatever. no one ever says "painted with a brush" haha

BBB: As a Montreal-based artist, how do you feel this has helped or hindered your success?

OMEN514: I feel it hinders me. I live in a broke ass city and although, as everyone knows, it's great for rent but when it comes to clients there are none. Art is a luxury industry. After you have your house and car and whatever then you can start to drop a few thousand on a piece of art. People do it, but if you live where there are millionaires like say, Miami or New York, it happens with more frequency. I sometimes feel like saying you are big in Montreal is like saying you are big in





Kosovo.

BBB: On that note, what were the reasonings to stay in Montreal as opposed to moving to say New York, Paris or London?

OMEN514: Who says I am? I have a short term plan to move to NYC in the next few years. I too want the chance to be an 'illegal immigrant, pay exorbitant rent and have shitty health care.

BBB: How do you feel the art community in Montreal and Quebec differs than that of the rest of the country?

OMEN514: It's a tricky question. It's hard to paint graffiti here and hope for a future in it. In other cities there is a more back and forth with their neighbours. Due to our political state here we don't have the greatest communication with our neighbours (A.K.A french scary). Imagine if we

were Toronto or basically a massive english speaking city. Do you not think that Americans wouldn't want to cross border up and party up in here? We are a straight line to NYC! Imagine how that would change the entire vibe of Montreal. It's not going to happen so here we will remain this quaint hamlet where you don't have to try too hard because you don't need much. Do YOU think the vibe would be the same? Montreal and Quebec are BROKE-ASS. But we have culture. That is what everyone says. But because we have no money people have to get "real jobs" or paint what the client want, or whatever it crushes most artist that don't have the longevity or strength to persevere. Would we be the same? No. Graffiti heads would stay underground longer and the street scene would stay fresh and exciting because old heads are making a living doing what they love instead of what they have to.

BBB: How do you feel the language

discussion plays a role in the practice of both your work and your contemporaries?

OMEN514: I am bilingual. Sooo... I guess none?

BBB: From painting the streets in the 90s to doing TEDx Talks at Universities, how would you describe your journey as an artist and what can we expect in the future from Omen514?

OMEN514: It's been a trip. You have to just remember that when I started it how crazy it was to think you could make a living as a graffiti artist. Now people do it all the time. I didn't get a degree. I trusted in the street. Now I am giving Ted talks at universities and presentation to architects. The world changed around me and grew up a bit and realized beauty is beauty where ever it appears. The future is still an uphill battle but it's ok. It keeps me strong.

WWWOMEN514.COM





Vladimir Kraynyk

VLADIMIR KRAYNYK'S WORK BECAME AWARE TO US THROUGH THE WONDERS OF THE INTERNET. KRAYNYK'S WORK HOLDS A TON OF BEAUTIFUL AND TRADITIONAL ASPECTS, THOUGH CLEARLY ROUTED IN STREET-ART. THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SOME OF THE MOST APPEALING WORK OUT THERE THESE DAYS IN OUR OPINION. WE'RE PLEASED TO PRESENT HIM TO OUR READERS TO SHOW HOW ARTISTS CAN BEAUTIFULLY AND BRILLIANTLY TRANSCEND VARIOUS ARTISTIC & CREATIVE FIELDS.



BizarreBeyondBelief: How would you describe your work to a blind person?

Vladimir Kraynyk: It would be something along the lines of dynamic and energetic, busy and detailed. I think it would be great to make a painting specifically for a person like that using very heavy texture for the person to be able to touch the painting and simultaneously tell him/

her about it.

BBB: As a graffiti writer turned fine-artist, how would you say the cultures differ between the two disciplines?

VK: They differ significantly. While graffiti mostly deals with aesthetic, technical or location concerns, fine art has much more to tackle with, namely a myriad of conceptual, art historical, symbolic, and many other aspects.

Graffiti is broad and quick. Fine art is smaller, slower, and much more concentrated. Each has its own pace.

BBB: How would you say your approach changes between the two mediums?

VK: As can be seen from the answer above, when painting on canvas, each square centimeter of a painting acquires more weight in both aesthetic









“

GRAFFITI IS ONLY HELD TO BE AN OUTCAST WITH LARGE SCALE
 WORK. BUT GRAFFITI IS OF COURSE WHAT IS VERY SMALL IN
 (MAYBE) CAN BE HELD TO BE A VERY LARGE OF NOTHING.

”



and conceptual way, which leads to a much measured, deliberate, thought through, and considerate approach.

BBB: How do the different mediums play a role in your current practice?

VK: Nowadays I mostly use oil and acrylic paints. Rarely combine acrylic and a bit of spray paint. A certain medium, like oil for example, is used because it better achieves a certain purpose. For example, if you need a perfectly blended, detailed, smooth surface, you will most like require to use oil paint because it has qualities that let you achieve the wanted result.

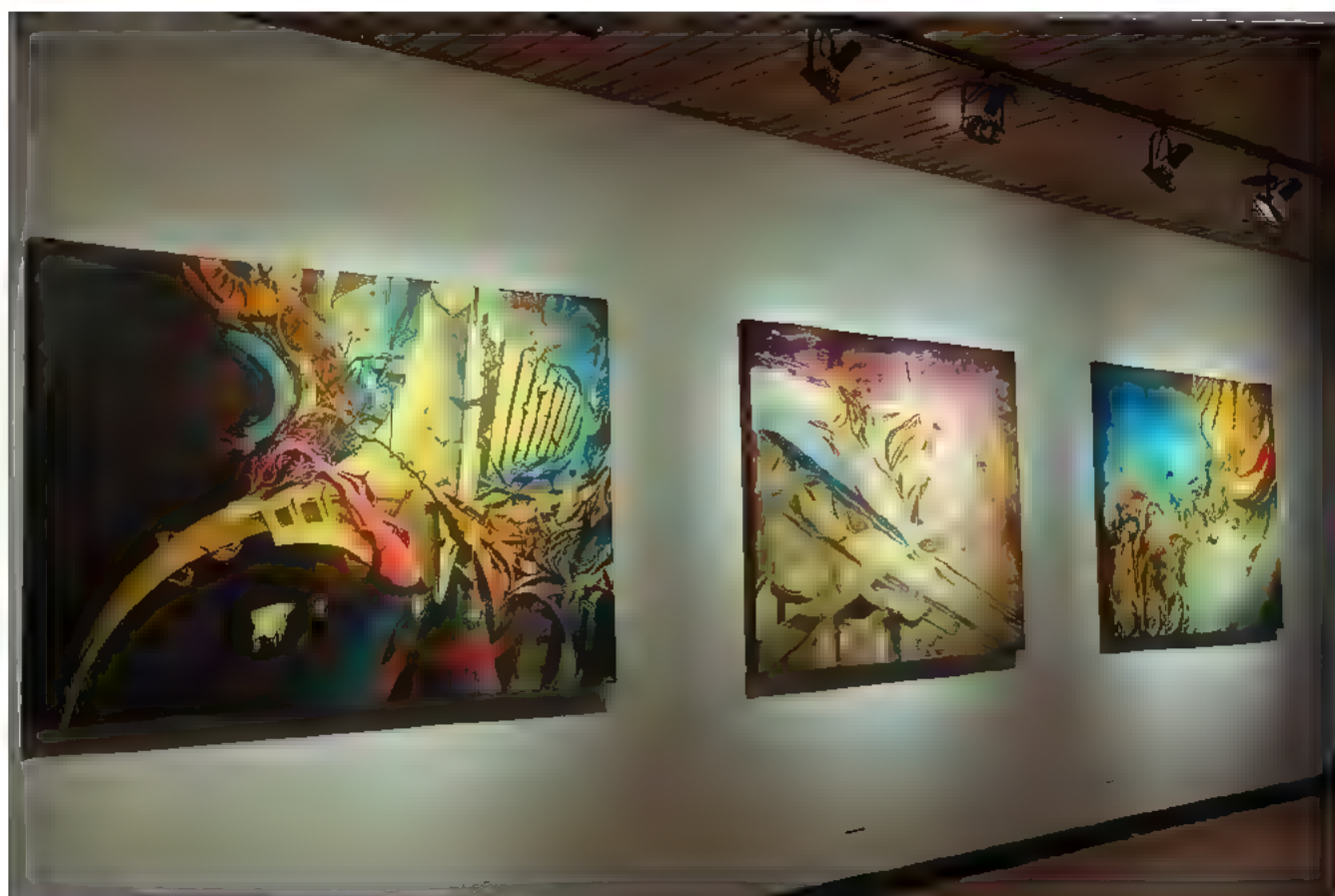
BBB: How do you feel about artist education institutions shaping the minds of artists in this day and age?

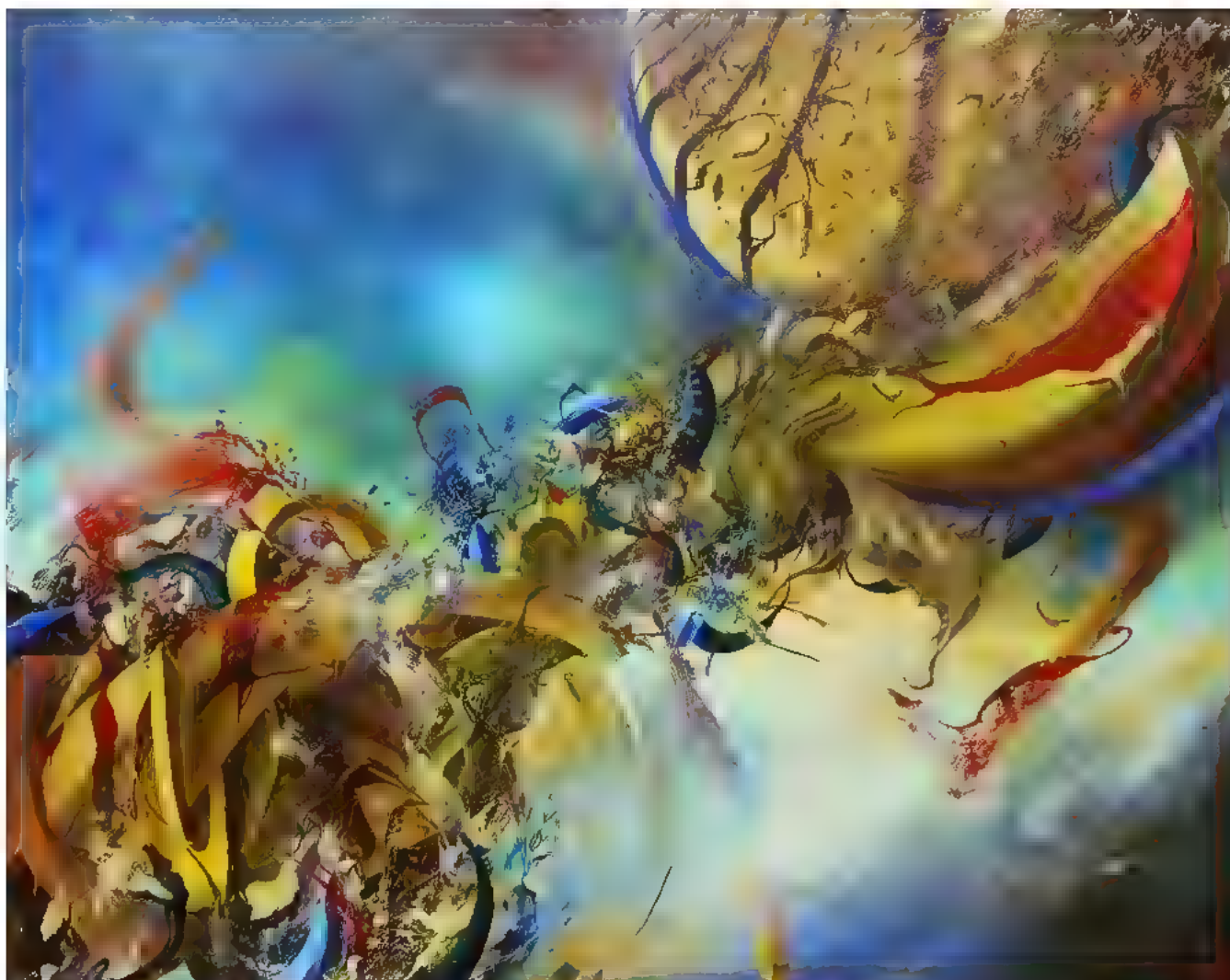
VK: From attending art school it has become clear to me, that art universities lost a lot when they minimized the teaching of skills and craft and focused on theoretical and conceptual issues (which can certainly be important, be they taught thoroughly). To be honest I've often encountered a failure to produce a consistent result in both realms, which is confirmed by the fact I hear from art professors, the fact being that majority of art graduates don't pursue artistic

practice in the future. To illustrate some of the problems I am talking about, I recommend a humorous but truthful video that is available on Youtube: "How to Graduate from Art School (Animation)".

BBB: As most artist tend to shy away from large-scale works, how do you feel size plays a role in the creation of your work?

VK: Graffiti really helped to be able to deal with large scale works. Size is relative too, of course. What is very small in graffiti, can be considered a very large oil painting. But, for





example, last year I've painted a commission mural of about 230 ft long, and without previous graffiti experience that might not have been possible.

BBB: How do you mentally prepare for conceptualizing a piece of work?

VK: I consider my painting to be in the very early stages of development, therefore things are most likely to

change a lot in the future. I think the best way to better conceptualize your work is to study other art, along with other realms you are interested in, and try to bring it all together in some combination or other, along with your own thoughts. It differs significantly from person to person, a painter is someone who is working towards developing his own unique voice, while not necessarily losing the universal element.

BBB: What are the core differences between using brushes versus spray-paint?

VK: To paint on canvas or a board, which is what I do most nowadays, I prefer brushes because they give me complete control of the medium and surface. At the same time, spray paint can achieve certain effects that are sometimes required, most often in combination with acrylic paintings. Or







is more a self-sufficient medium for me.

BBB: Do you have a preferred medium or do the two play off of each other?

VK: I really like oil paint, but, as mentioned above, sometimes mediums play off each other.

BBB: What is it about abstraction that fascinated you as opposed to creating more traditional work like landscapes or portraiture?

VK: Traditional (and in genera

representational) works fascinate me just as much. And this is something where a lot of my interest is directed towards. Abstraction, nonetheless, can be a great tool to capture certain things that are not obviously evident in representational painting. I am interested in both at the moment.

BBB: When you're not working in the studio or on a wall, what 3 things outside of art do you enjoy doing?

VK: Reading, playing chess, biking.

BBB: What info, projects or events

can fans and our readers expect from you in the near future?

This summer I am planning to create a body of new work and to have a show of it presented in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which is where I live at the moment. If you're interested in updates, process photos and other details, follow me on Instagram: <http://instagram.com/vadkraynyk>

Also planning on updating my website soon: www.vladimirkraynyk.com

Thank you.

WWWVLADIMIRKRAYNYK.COM











BIAS [OWN]

THRILLS US TO GET HIM IN OUR PUBLICATION. THE DUDE HAS A RAW STYLE AND TALENT THAT IS WELL BEYOND HIS YEARS. FURTHERMORE, HIS DEDICATION AND LOVE FOR THE



BizarreBeyondBelief: Various cities and countries have different origins of the culture, can you give us a brief history on the development of graffiti in South Africa?

BIAS: Graffiti in South Africa is a seriously new thing and in comparison to many overseas countries we are really in some of the pre-beginning stages. It only really started in South Africa after the end of Apartheid around 1994-1995. I cannot comment on exactly when many early pioneers actually started because I only started about a decade later although I am still one of the intermediate writers in terms of time. From what I know various artists Gogga, Aybe, Tapz, Trix, Link, Tear, Tek, Dredr, Wise, Tower, Rasty, Toe, Maxi, Falko, Faith, Skiet, DrOne Curio, Void, Hac1 were doing it from around '97, '98,

'99. Rasty was one of the first people to set up a real graffiti store in the city and that really pushed the scene to the next level. At about the same time Cape Town did the same although Cape Town has a different story in that their scene was considered ahead of the Joburg scene stylistically for a very long time.

BBB: When did you begin painting graffiti and what/who fascinated you about the culture?

BIAS: I started actually painting in 2005 although I was interested in it from about 2003. I started because of an artist called Aybe, part of one of South Africa's most prolific crews, Demolition Squad. I saw his tags a lot around where I lived and was fascinated about how letters could be manipulated so differently to the

conventional ways we are taught. At the time I didn't really know much about the culture. I just knew I wanted to try it probably because of the freedom involved. I started off using crappy paint and racking caps until Montana came in drips and drabs.

BBB: What was the graffiti scene like in South Africa when you began painting?

When I began painting I really didn't know anyone at all, a few friends from school kind of did it as a passing phase but none of them lasted. I was always aware of other people's pieces but I just did my own thing which was a lot of exploring and learning the basics. I used to paint and search for Aybe pieces leading me to a lot of hidden gems that I know most people these days don't even know or care about.

There was a huge hip hop emphasis back then I remember a friend telling me I would never be good at Graffiti because I didn't listen to hip hop at the time. A few years later this same friend was asking me to teach him how to paint. P.S. I love hip hop.

BBB: When graffiti became prominent in South Africa, how did the public receive the movement?

BIAS: It still is becoming prominent although it differs city to city for instance the democratic party that governs Durban has done a good job cleaning the place up and the writers are very demotivated over there as so the scene currently probably consists of a literally 10 active writers, the Cape Town scene has been consistently churning out solid pieces for years but it's a lot cleaner than it was

due to political actions and a certain crippling by law so trains and bombing are common. My city is fast becoming one of the more productive cities in terms of graffiti up until a few years ago we didn't even get much "street art" now it's booming with stickers/stencils as well as tons and tons of pieces, bombing, trains and full colour concept pieces...many artists from other cities have begun moving here. Also the police don't seem to care, there is no graffiti unit everything is take what you like. As far as the public reaction about 80% don't realise what is in front of them (system slaves) and the rest actively enjoy it.

BBB: How would you say S.A graffiti differs stylistically from other countries?

BIAS: In terms of style it's pretty

broad as we have all types euro to wildstyle; one thing for certain is that the scene is lacking good character artists and 3D artists. There are very few of these types of artists unlike European countries such as France where they seem to be heavily dominated by 3D. I like to think the styles produced here mirror the harsh 3rd world country we live in and each artist's interpretation of their environment are replicated in this way. So the general style I think is pretty raw and sharp.

BBB: With the rise of the internet and more specifically social media, how do you feel that's played a role in your artist development?

BIAS: For my personal development it has helped tremendously, after reading "the exchange" in about





PEOPLE ARE SCARED OF THE GAME UNTIL THEY ACTUALLY
GET HERE. THEN THEY TELL EVERYONE AND REPEAT VISITS





2010 the internet was a super useful tool for me to easily speak to other overseas writers mainly from Canada and participate in over 30 exchanges over two years (and even now). In that time I explored and painted over 200 tunnels in one year inspired by writers such as Agens and others I had seen painting virgin surfaces. Obviously half of my development came from painting a ton and discussing new ideas with my crew mate Zesta (who I also met over facebook and is now one of my closest friends) but I couldn't have reached out to other artists without it. The internet is a funny thing because when I started graffiti we barely had a 56k internet line and things like Wikipedia were new. If you wanted to look at porn, let alone graph pics, they would load inch by inch from the eyes down

and you would have to muffle your router with a pillow so you wouldn't wake your parents. The internet blows my mind these days and there seems to be a small internet community on Instagram which is pretty cool actually! But at the same time I hate it because of all the beef haha.

BBB: On that note, how has it helped in the awareness of South African graffiti?

BIAS: I think it has helped; hopefully this article will help even more. I am not sure if many people (especially overseas) actually know how nice South Africa is to visit we have a weak currency, cheap paint, hot and sunny weather even during the winter, virgin walls, big booty black girls, so many

spots, a government that hardly cares and pieces stay up for years. We apparently also have lions roaming the streets. It's a good place; many people are scared of the crime until they actually get here, then they tell everyone and repeat visit!

BBB: What surfaces are the most desirable to paint in in JoBurg (i.e. walls, trains, tunnels)?

In Joburg its mainly walls, I would say trains too but that kind of goes up and down and I think most people can't be bothered especially with how dangerous it is. I have painted a shit ton of tunnels for my own personal reasons partly because I have already painted a lot of walls and I see it as an investment but also because







love exploring and the ambiance and stillness of such places. Also I hate priming so virgin concrete is where it's at for me!

BBB: As a PhD candidate, how do you feel your education has played a role in your career in graffiti?

BIAS: Well in terms of how I am I have always drawn on walls since I was a kid and I have always loved exploring and visiting Archaeological sites, my field is very technologically driven and very visual so all of this compliments everything I do. The fact that I will soon have a PhD really just gives me more opportunity to travel and have something to fall back on if I want to paint forever which is the goal instead of burning out and remaining stagnant. Other than that it has made me think A LOT about why I do it, why other

people do it or don't and I suppose helped in building self composure for me and my actions. It is also important to me in that that city I live in is a very fast paced city, having the opportunity to have the best of both worlds i.e fast paced Graffiti style and tent dwelling work in nature really counts towards my sanity haha!!

BBB: As an educated man, how do you look at the graffiti both personally and a culture morally?

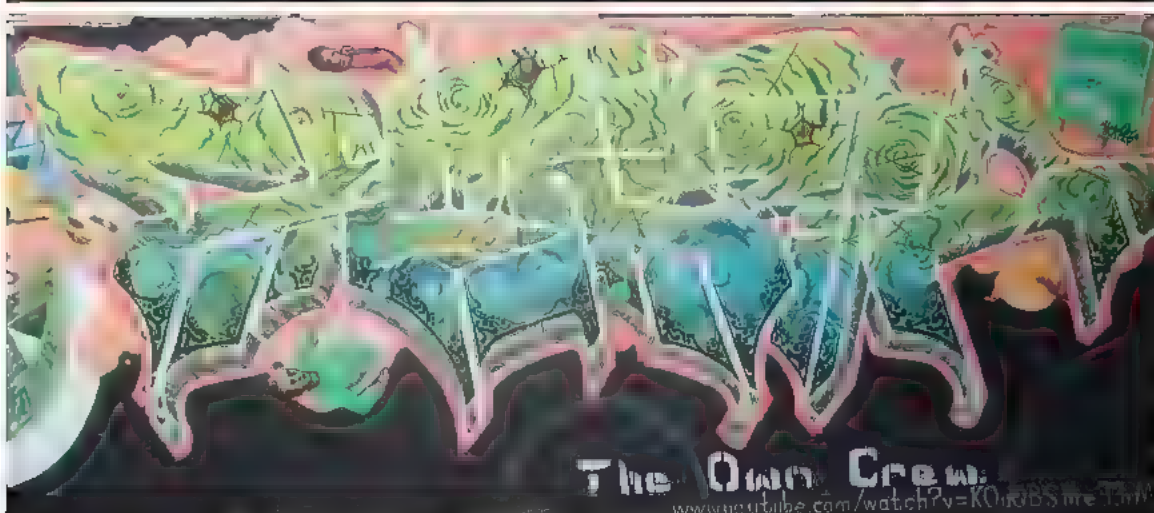
BIAS: Graffiti is such a mindfuck I could really answer this question endlessly! But personally graffiti is pure relaxation and exploration of self for me! Morally do what you like bomb what you like if it makes you feel good but make sure you do it for all the right reasons. You shouldn't lie to yourself. That is all

BBB: With school, art and personal life on the go, what can we expect in the future from BIAS?

BIAS: The future haha. I have been offered a 6month course in France to do 3D and maybe earn some 3D style from the baguette lovers! But other than that aiming to paint more more more and when I finish my work I want to visit Canada for sure!! Shouts to Mars, Mein, Aybe, Tyke, Tapz, Fiya, Rekso, Fury, Tensoe2, Agens, Poser and the people that inspire me such as Bacon, Rasty and Zesta. Thanks BBB.

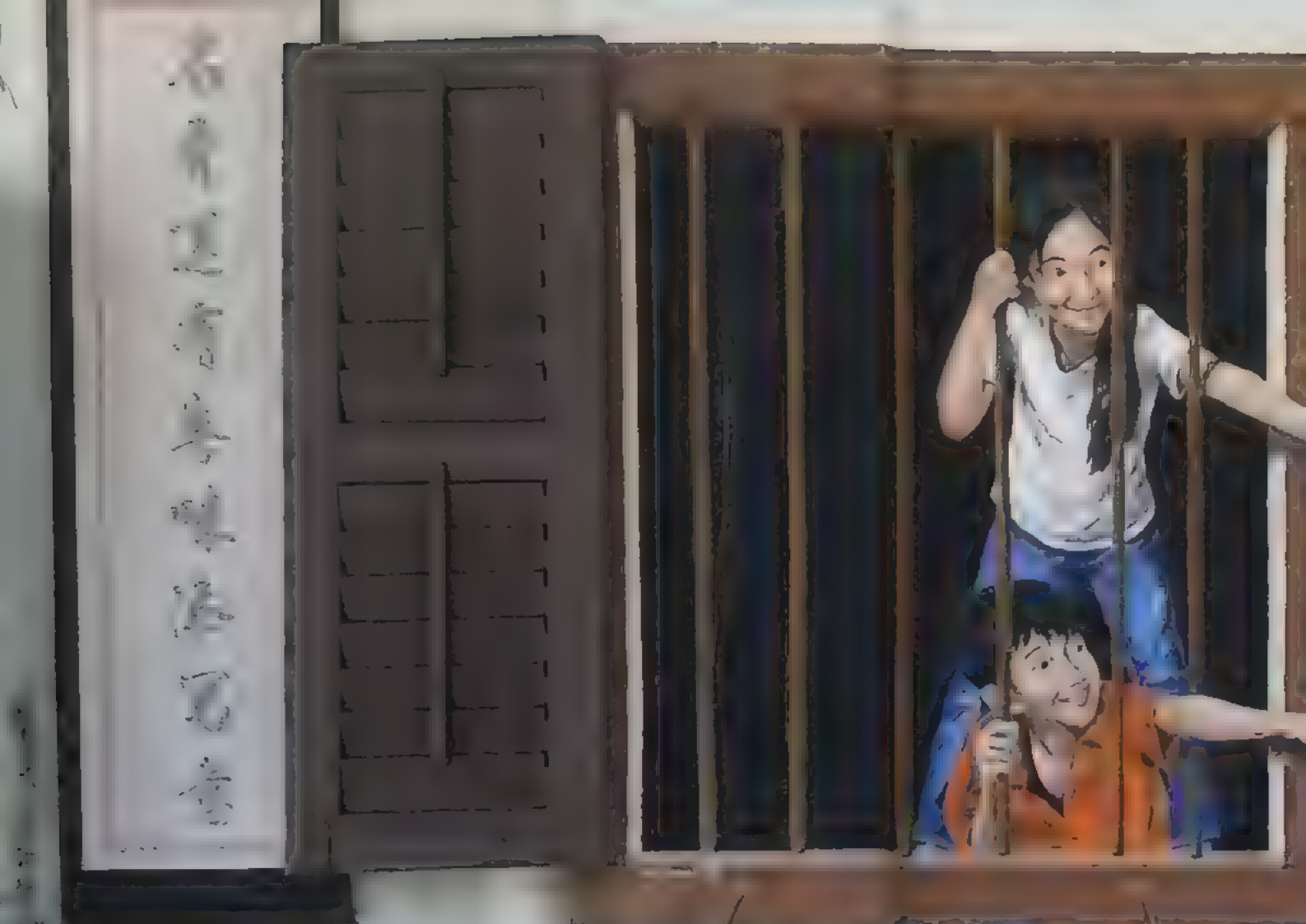
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Malaysian Street Art

OUR DEAR FIREND AND BBB CORRESPONDENT BETH ZENER RECENTLY ESCAPED THE CANADIAN FROZEN TUNDRA TO GET OUT ACROSS THE WORLD TO SEE SOME OF THE BEAUTIFUL AND ANCIENT SIGHTS OF THE EASTERN WORLD. IN THIS SPOTLIGHT ON MALAYSIAN STREET-ART BETH GOT A TON OF INCREDIBLE PHOTOS OF PIECES WE'VE ONLY SEEN ON THE INTERNET AND KNEW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT. ALLOW HER GIVE YOU AN MORE IN DEPTH LOOK INTO MALAYSIAN STREET ART SCENE AND COMMUNITY THROUGH HER BEAUTIFUL WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY.



"While Canadians were suffering the perils of one of the worst winters in history, I was lucky enough to skip town for a handful of tropical destinations, mostly scattered throughout Southeast Asia. Most who venture throughout the continent find spicy street eats, cheap markets, sky high palm trees, or even themselves. In my case, I unexpectedly found a whole lot of street art culture.

Hidden between mosques, Indian rotundas and traditional Chinese temples are tight alleyways in the UNESCO city of Georgetown, Malaysia that are littered with giant murals ranging from

the playful to subtle protest pieces. Georgetown is one of the most diverse cities in the country and is considered a cultural hodgepodge where Chinese, Indian, and Malay all coexist. This produces a breeding ground for social discussion as ethnic differences, traditional beliefs and modernity clash. A perfect premise for street art commentary.

A major player in the movement in Georgetown is Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic who not only contributes to some of the profound works lining the streets, but also transformed an abandoned bus station into a

contemporary gallery. In a region of the world where you're more likely to find a dilapidated apartment complex rather than a converted art space, I was pleasantly surprised at an urban art scene that seemingly continues to blossom.

The iconic image of children riding a bike was the busiest spot for photo ops but as an animal lover, the ginger kitty and I took the cake for selfies. If you ever plan to hit the Southeast Asia circuit, definitely don't skip out on this vibrant city."

***Words / Photos: Beth Leigh Zener**

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NYCHOS

FROM THE HONOLULU-BASED FILM COMPANY
 THE GUY IS ABSOLUTELY KILLING IT RIGHT NOW IN ALL ASPECTS OF
 THE WORD. FROM TRAVELLING THE GLOBE AND CRUSHING SHOWS, TO
 DISSECTING TONS OF ANIMALS ON MASSIVE WALLS IN COUNTLESS CITIES.
 WE'RE HONoured TO HAVE A FEATURE WITH HIM AND GET TO SHOWCASE
 HIS TALENTS AND HIS PASSION FOR THE ART OF THE WALL.



NYCHOS

FROM THE HONOLULU-BASED FILM "THE HONOLULU FILM" BY JONAS MEYER

THE GUY IS ABSOLUTELY KILLING IT RIGHT NOW IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE WORD. FROM TRAVELLING THE GLOBE AND CRUSHING SHOWS, TO DISSECTING TONS OF ANIMALS ON MASSIVE WALLS IN COUNTLESS CITIES. WE'RE HONoured TO HAVE A FEATURE WITH HIM AND GET TO SHOWCASE



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NYCHOS

FROM THE HONOLULU-BASED FILM "THE HONOLULU HONOLULU" BY JONATHAN HARRIS

THE GUY IS ABSOLUTELY KILLING IT RIGHT NOW IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE WORD. FROM TRAVELLING THE GLOBE AND CRUSHING SHOWS, TO DISSECTING TONS OF ANIMALS ON MASSIVE WALLS IN COUNTLESS CITIES. WE'RE HONoured TO HAVE A FEATURE WITH HIM AND GET TO SHOWCASE

NYCHOS THE WEIRD

The Austrian urban art and graffiti illustrator Nychos was born in 1982 in Styria, Austria where he grew up in a hunting family. Getting confronted by the anatomy of dead animals at an early age and being an 80's kid with an interest for cartoons and heavy metal ended up being some of the ingredients which inspired him when he started graffiti and painting at the age of 18. Over the years he developed a distinctive style which stands out: his dissections and cross sections of human and animal bodies are easily recognized. The focus and reinterpretation of dissected motives in a combination of colorful outlines can be seen as his branding.

He is well known for his huge and technically outstanding art pieces in the urban environment as well as several gallery exhibitions. In 2013 he had solo shows in Detroit (Inner State Gallery), New York (Mighty Tanaka) and Turin (Galo Art Gallery), besides

traveling the world, painting in over 15 different cities and participating in Art Base Miami Beach, Pow Wow Hawaii and many other events. He's currently seen as one of the most sought after artists of the street art scene. In 2014 three solo shows in San Francisco (Fly24SF) AND Singapore (Mighty Jaxx) are planned amongst a set of festivals, events, conferences and fairs.

Nychos is also part of international graffiti and urban illustration crews like "The Lords", "The Weird Crew" and "The Jukebox Cowboys".

"Combining the comic character with how a body actually works is really interesting to me". (Nychos, March 2013)

Nychos is the founder of Rabbit Eye Movement:

Rabbit Eye Movement, REM, started as a Streetart concept, based in Vienna, founded by the urban/graffiti artist and illustrator Nychos in 2005

In 2012 the Movement grew and they opened the doors of their own Art Space and the REM team started to work full time as an agency.

This movement of urban artists is active all around the globe consisting of both national and international artists many with a background in illustration. The agency is bringing everyone together, giving them a platform in the Art Space, connecting them to brands and creating unique gear together.

Nychos: "I always saw the Rabbit Eye Movement as an Homage to all the "Rabbits" out there being active in the Urban art Movement doesn't matter what kind of Mission they are following."

Credit:

"The Easter Rabbit" Mural
Photographed by: Upper Playground

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Simon Birch

SIMON BIRCH HAS BEEN A FINE-ART FAVOURITE OF OURS FOR YEARS. SINCE FOLLOWING HIS WORK THROUGHOUT ART SCHOOL, WE'RE ECSTATIC TO FINALLY GET A CHANCE TO PICK HIS BRAIN A LITTLE BIT. THIS GUY IS ONE OF THE MOST UNBELIEVABLY SKILLED IN RAW TALENT ARTISTS WE'VE HAD IN OUR MAGAZINE. BIRCH IS FULL OF ENERGY NOT ONLY IN HIS PAINTINGS BUT IN HIS PERSONALITY. HE CAN GUARANTEE YOU THAT IF YOU DON'T KNOW HIS WORK, HE WILL EASILY BECOME ONE OF YOUR FAVOURITE PAINTERS.

by [illegible]



BizarreBeyondBelief Can you describe your origins as an artist and what led you to choosing a career as a painter?

Simon Birch: I guess I was born an artist, as perhaps we all are. I drew and painted automatically and never stopped. I grew up mostly in the Midlands but left home and school at 17 and got involved in clubbing as promoter and DJ. After being initially very successful, by the time I was 21, I was broke and out of options. I left England and travelled the world doing odd jobs eventually ending up in Hong Kong where I worked construction.

Through all this I continued to paint and new friends encouraged me to show the work. The art scene was very undeveloped in HK so there was little opportunity to exhibit so I made my own shows anywhere I could find a blank wall. I did this for many years until one day I said one. It kind of snowballed from there, ten years ago. I didn't choose to be an artist, I just have always been one.

BBB: Though always rooted in figurative content matter your work has developed into more abstraction, can you describe the evolution of your work over the years?

SB: It happens organically from piece to piece. There's a general conceptual push behind the work but even that changes with time as I change and knowledge and experience expands. So when I evolve, the work evolves. Same for everyone I guess. I also get bored easily and keep away from repeating myself, pushing towards improving the quality of my work and at the same time as further questioning my work and the world around me. That artistic, human and intellectual process leads to a constant progress, the work changes. Partly intuitive, partly by design, partly by accident. Here in China many artists do very well by staying in one style endlessly, that's just not for me.

BBB: What is your educational background in the arts and do you feel educational institutions are important for artistic development?

SB: I didn't have any education before my career took off. I bounced from school when I was about 17 and never went back. Education is important for some people, they need that guidance, but not for others and some people just don't have the choice or opportunity. It's down to the individual. Some very well educated people are useless, some uneducated people are brilliant, and vice versa. I had a go, recently I did an MFA, just to find out for myself if it would benefit my work. It didn't. I learned more from free diving, bushido, surfing, snowboarding,



Left Image: "Blunt Alone StarFizzer" 140cm x 140cm, 2014

Above Image: "Crowbar" - 180cm x 180cm, 2014

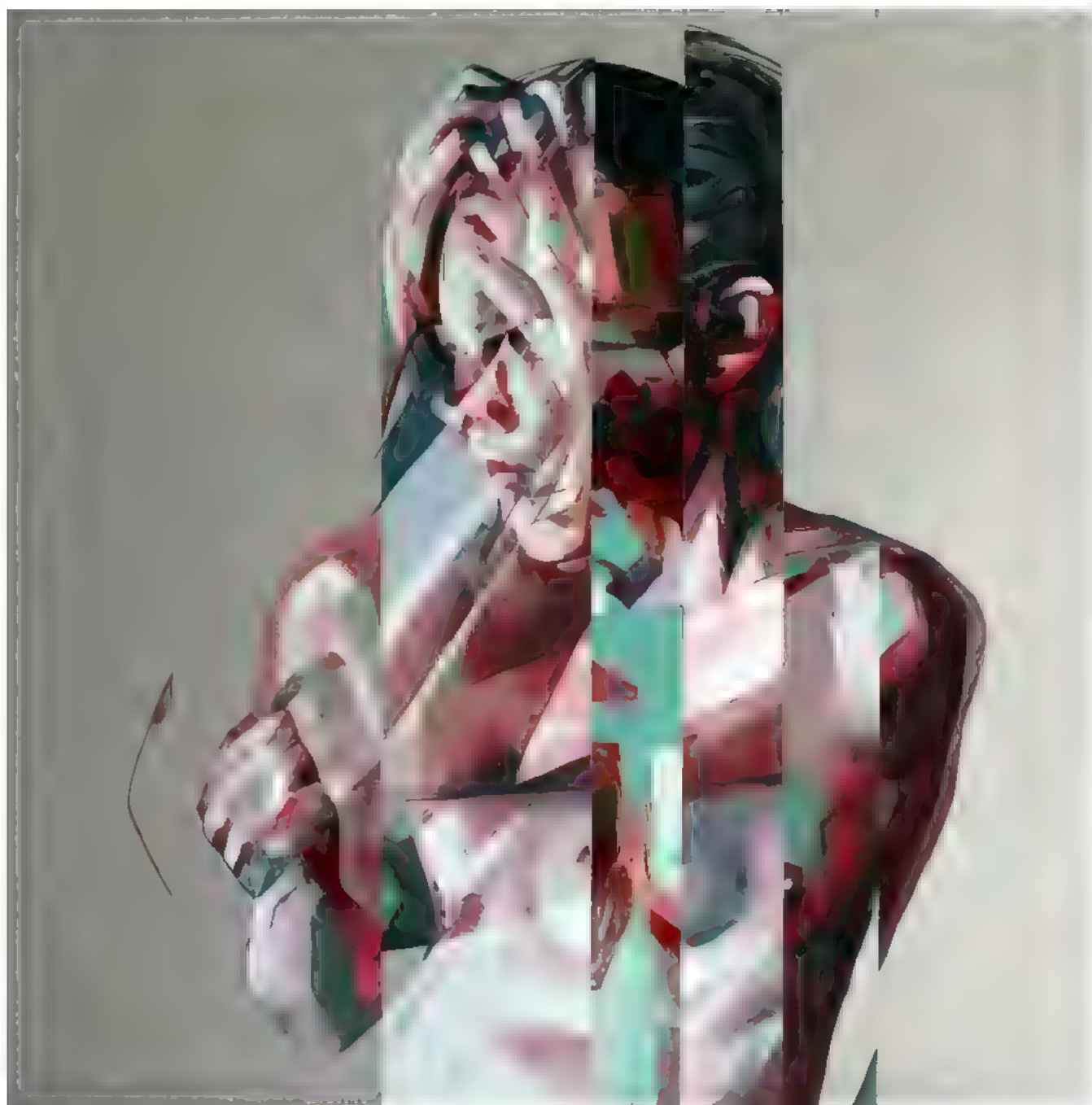


Image: "Kid Pickle" 130cm x 130cm, 2014

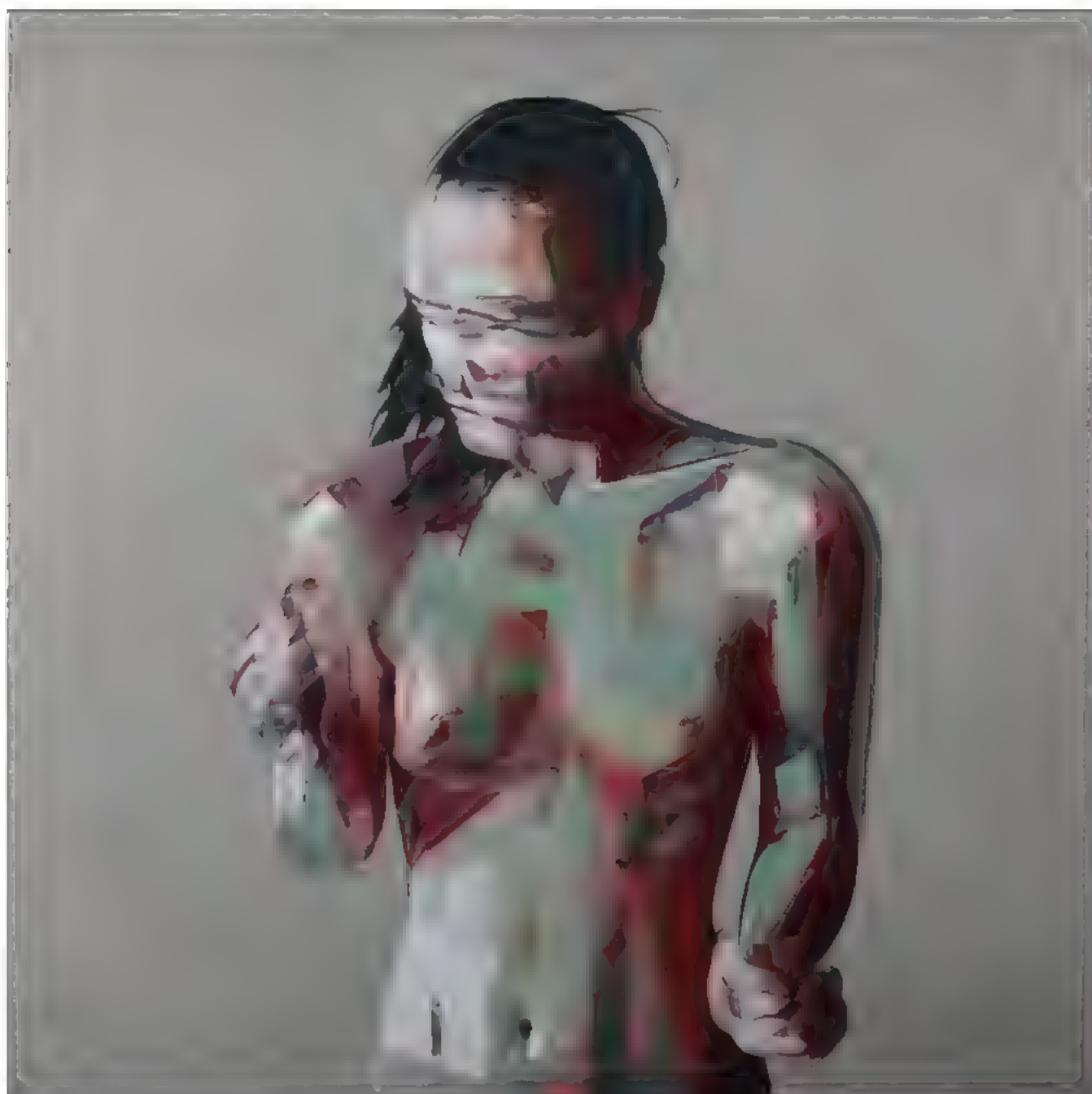


Image: "K dnap" 180cm x 180cm, 2014



“DON'T TAKE YOUR OWN
LIFE.
YOU CAN TAKE YOUR OWN
LIFE.”

image: "SPSTK"
140cm x 140cm, 2014



Image: "The Cutter"
320cm x 205cm, 2014

MMA, movies, music, motorbike racing, loving, fighting, failing and the million other things I've dived into over the years, than a formal education could ever provide

BBB: Is there a need for these institutions in this day and age?

SB: Yes, if they are any good. If they progress. Many people really need guidance. I do too but not the type one could get from a formal education. With the rise of the internet and social media, how do you feel this helps or hinders artistic development? It can be a huge distraction and a wonderful revelation. Seeing the mass of art going on around the world through the internet, one can feel a bit of an outsider, or outgunned, but equally it can offer a great way for an outsider to be exposed and inspired.

You can see art from around the world even if you can't afford the plane ticket and entry fee to the MOMA. But I'm not involved enough in the digital world to give a particularly qualified answer.

BBB: Could these also benefit artists exposure or do they applications allow for too large of an artist pool?

SB: As above. But I like change and the new digital era really shakes things up. Love it. Takes power away from institutions and the old school way of doing things. That's all good.

BBB: Being that you're UK born, what were your reasons in moving permanently to Hong Kong?

SB: I had to leave UK, as mentioned

earlier up the interview, I had made a mess of my life so it was the easy option. I ended up in Oz for a while, surfing and painting, pretty low profile. Then my visa ran out and Hong Kong, as a British colony, was a place I could go and work. It was easy to find a day job, working as a labourer on a big bridge construction project, and it allowed me enough free time to paint. My life, work and career have progressed dramatically here so I've had no reason to leave. I really fell in love with the place.

BBB: How would you describe the arts community in Hong Kong?

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SB: Introvert, insular. Not much sense of unity, not much ambition, not much confidence. Hong Kong, both socially and institutionally, doesn't really encourage and support arts

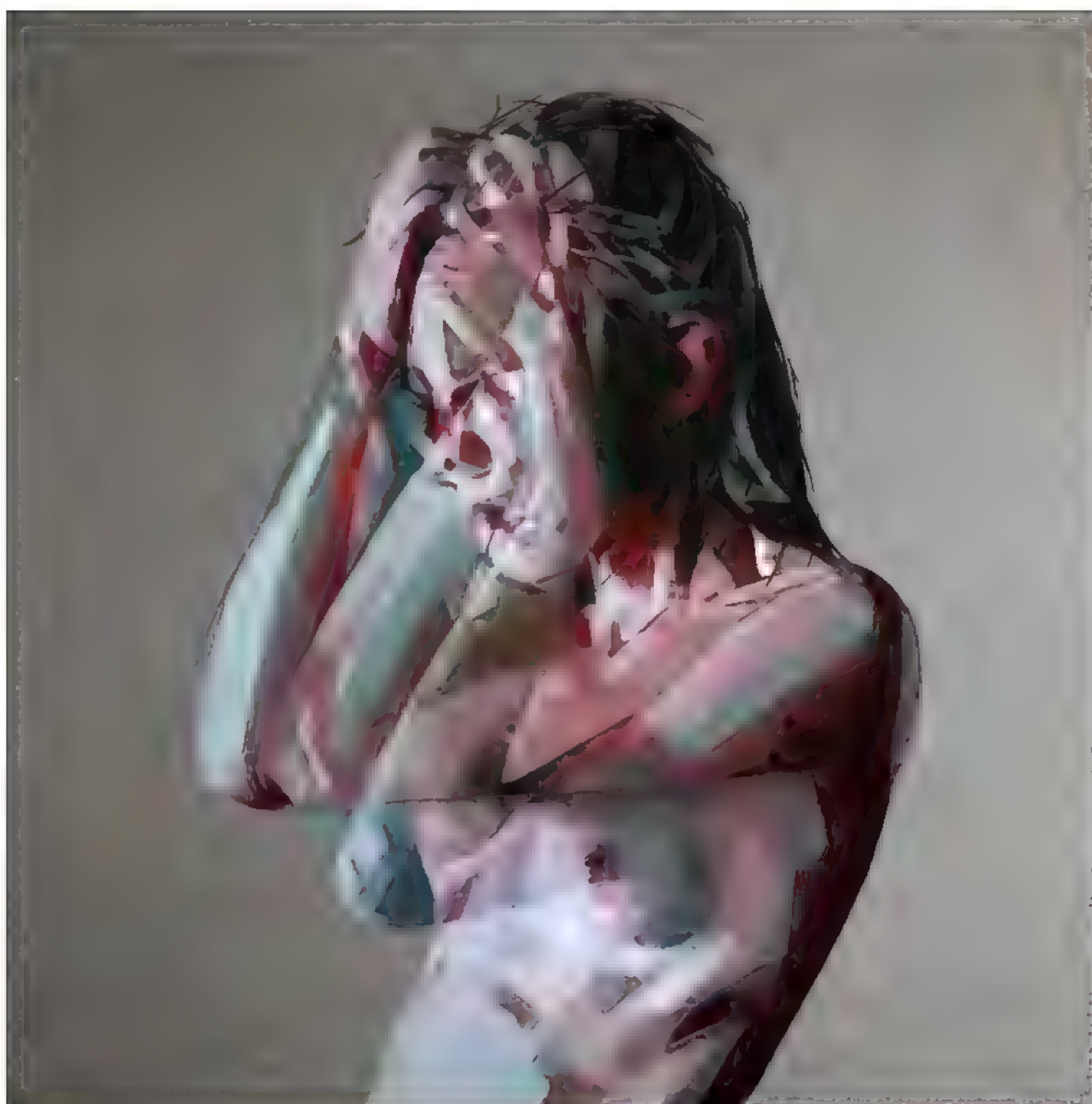


Image "Pickle" 100cm x 100cm, 2014



Image: "TMRW" - 220cm x 220cm, 2014

development. Most art activity is imported and revolves around commerce. So we have Art Base, Sotheby's and Christie's, Gagosian, White Cube, etc.. but not much local organic development. Few artists, no contemporary art museum, limited space to expose artists, little art press and rents so high no artist can survive without a day job and therefore little time to produce art. It sounds depressing but it also means that without a flood of local art activity, there's no competition so if you can find a way to make and expose your work, you're one of the few. From my own experience, everything one does here is pioneering. I've been the first artist to do many things here and have had much positive impact with my activity and I've broken many records in local arts terms. I couldn't have achieved all this in NYC. The only thing against me is that I'm a westerner so am not really considered a Hong Kong artist, even after being here 17 years. But it's also given me wonderful opportunities, allowed me to produce

groundbreaking shows and also contribute greatly to the community. Anyway, the point is, HK has been a cultural wasteland but things change and it feels like it's becoming a very exciting place to be an artist because art is so new here.

BBB: How does it compare and contrast with that of your native United Kingdom?

SB: I'm so out of the loop with UK I wouldn't know how to answer. I'm about to show in London at the end of the year. I feel like a foreign artist.

BBB: Considering your work branches off from just painting and ventures into film and installation, how does your creative process differentiate between the media?

SB: It's all just paint to me. Film, installation, sculpture, neon, performance, design, collaboration. Everything I do is the same concept using different materials or methods.

It's not always obvious but I'm quite sure of my intention. It's all perfectly connected in my mind.

BBB: As an artist who's been featured in many publications and exhibited all over the world, what can we expect from Simon Birch over the coming years?

SB: I will continue to do my thing and do it well. I honestly just want to make great art and I'm just getting started but I'm working on a couple of massive installation projects in NYC, a feature film in LA, a solo show in London, collaborations with architects and fashion designers and hopefully pushing my paintings into some very interesting new territory.

BBB: What tips or advice would you have for aspiring artists or designers?

SB: I'm often asked what my advice is to young creatives. I usually answer, don't take advice, from me, or anyone else. Work it out yourselves. With love..

WWW.SIMON-BIRCH.COM

Facebook: The Art of Simon Birch

Instagram: @monkeymodified

Right image: "Srewfizzer" 190x160cm, 2013



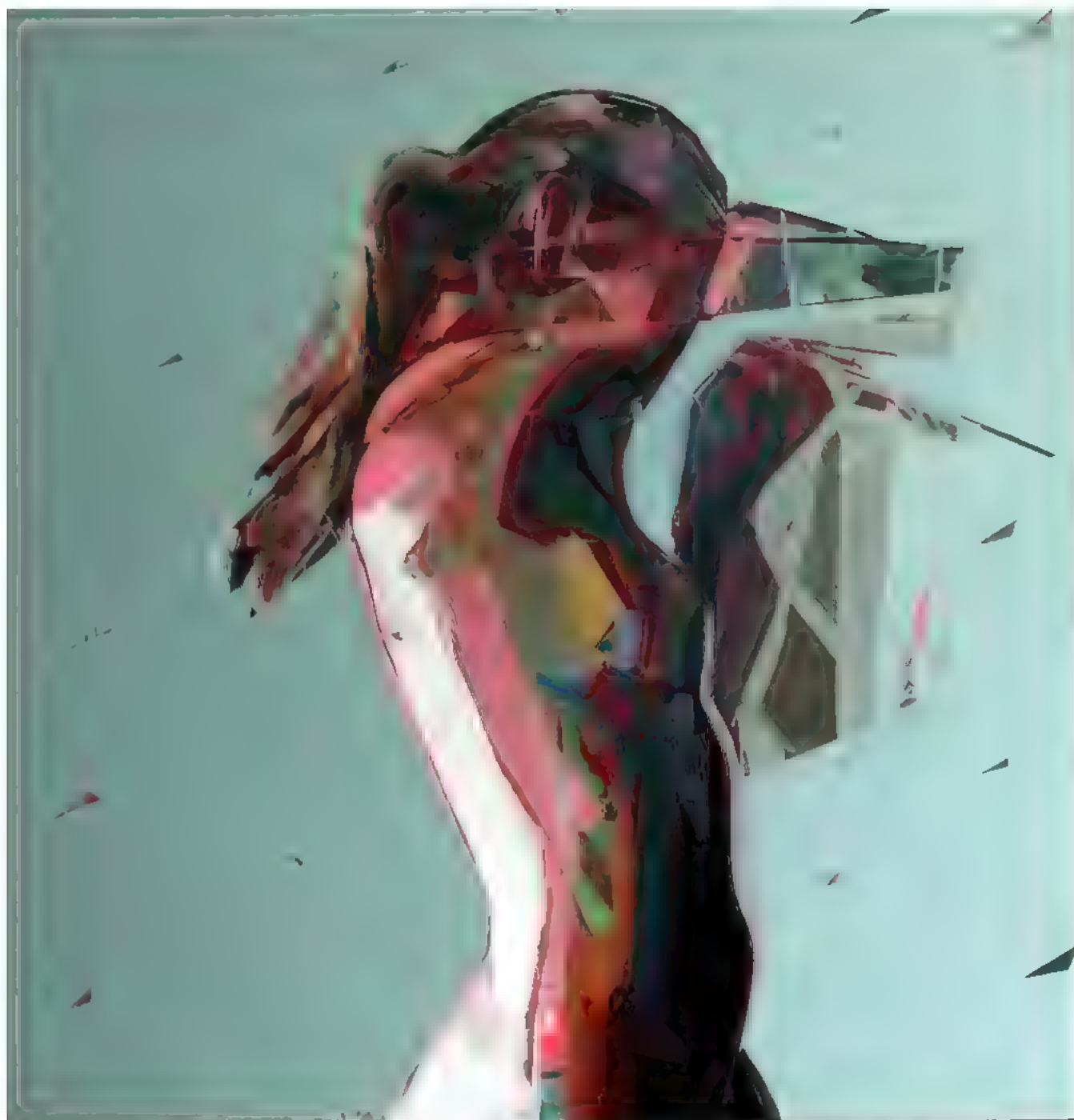


Image: "Ultra Hyper Caine" · 225cm x 225cm, 2014



Image: "Straightjacket" 100cm x 100cm, 2014





Buff Monster

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN OUR MAGAZINE THEN WITHOUT A DOUBT YOU'RE ALREADY WELL AWARE OF BUFF MONSTER AND HIS WORK. FOR BUFF MONSTER'S STYLE IS UNDENIABLY FRESH AND CATCHY, ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE AESTHETICS IN ALL OF STREET-ART. WITH A BEAUTIFUL JUXTAPOSITION OF FUN AND DARK, IT NEVER SURPRISES THAT HIS WORK IS EXTREMELY APPEALING TO ARTISTS, COLLECTORS AND CORPORATIONS ALIKE. WE'LL STOP THE CHITTER-CHATTER AND LET THE MAN'S INCREDIBLE WORK AND POWERFUL WORDS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.



BBB: Many aspects of street-art is routed in painting and lettering, what first attracted you to street-art to begin pasting up hand-silkscreened posters?

Buff Monster: We I used to paint letters but then putting up posters became much more interesting to me. But after all these years, I'm back to painting and drawing letters, just not really in a graffiti context.

BBB: Knowing that all forms of street-art is ephemeral, did this not deter you from putting countless amount of time into your work on the streets?

BM No; it's just part of the game.

BBB: Your work ranges far beyond the streets, how does your approach differ from a public piece versus a piece of merchandise?

BM First, it's important to consider how a person will see or interact with the piece. Other than that, you just gotta use the right tool for the job.

BBB: Your work contains bubbly and bright content contrasted many times with dark imagery, how do you feel the two play off of one another in your work?

Very well





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THE MELTY MISFITS



DESERTED DAN

BBB: Your “Melly Misfits” project is an homage to the Garbage Pail Kids. What is the significance in paying homage to GPK?

BM: Garbage Pail Kids had a profound impact on me when I was a kid. Those cards have influenced a lot of my approach and interest in art. I didn’t set out to make the most ambitious homage to GPKs, but that’s just how it turned out. My Kickstarter campaign for Series 2 ended recently, so I’m in the middle of working on those.

BBB: Known to have much Japanese influence in your work, what is it about Japanese culture that fascinates you?

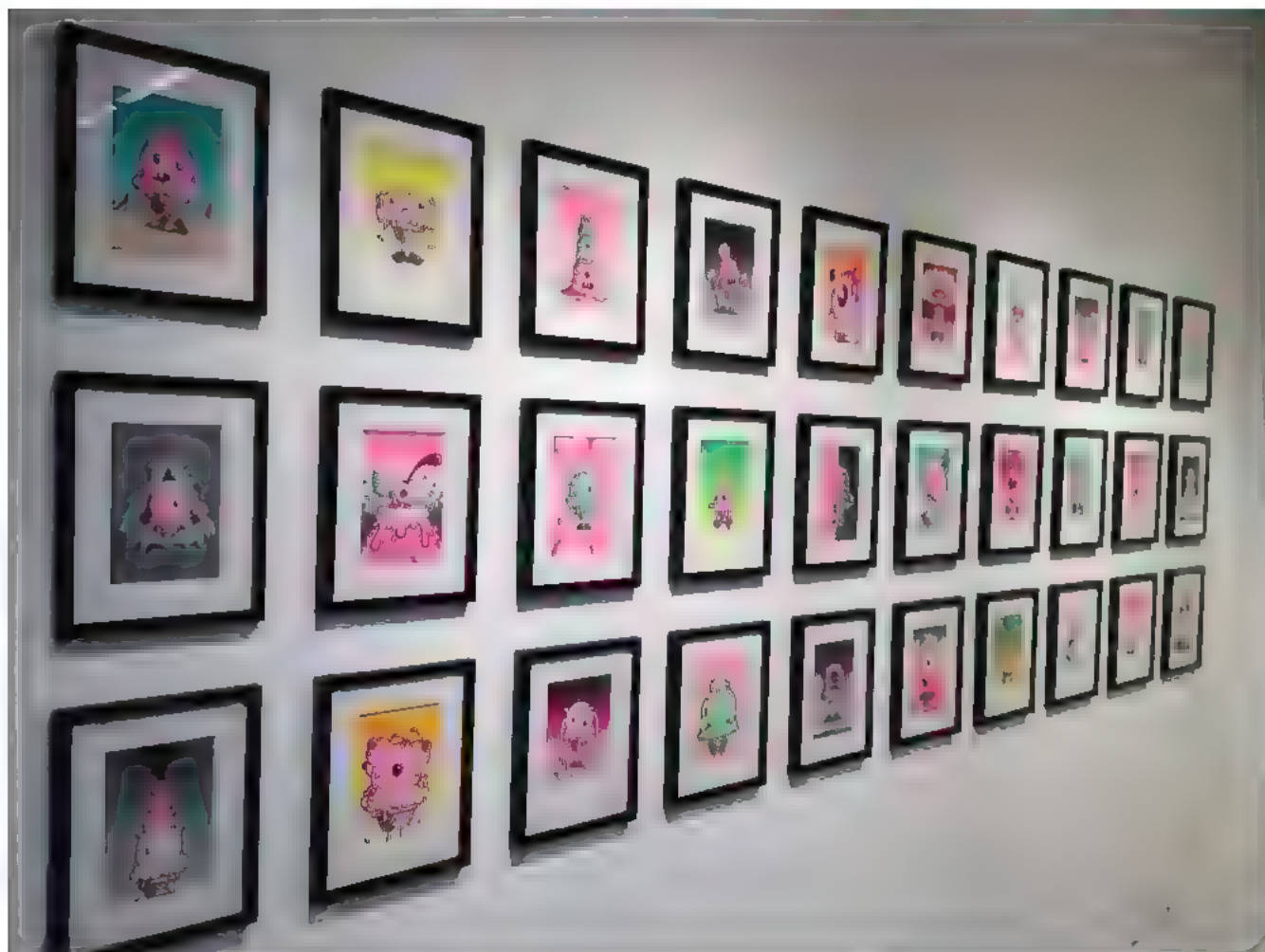
BM: I grew up in Hawaii and the local culture there is very influenced by Japanese culture. So I grew up with lots of Japanese people, food and customs so it feels very natural to me, but there’s also so much about their pop culture that is really interesting.

BBB: With a repertoire of clients

from MTV to Disney, how does corporation collaboration affect your creative process?

BM: Well there’s always a client. Usually I’m the client but sometimes the client is a big company. It’s all pretty much the same. I want the project to work well, meet the established criteria and for the client to be happy.

BBB: Street-art, but more specifically graffiti, is always said







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THE MELTY MISFITS



SPLIT RICK

to be routed in Hip-Hop, yet you maintain a Heavy Metal influence, how would you describe music playing a role in your practice?

BM: I love Heavy Metal! It's so awesome. There are so many sub-genres that you can always find something to fit your mood. And that's important. Anytime I'm inside working, I'm always listening to Metal. It inspires and motivates me.

BBB: On that note, if you're painting a wall or in a heavy studio session, what 5 albums by which artist would

be coming through you headphones?

BM: Anything by Iron Maiden, Dimmu Borgir, 3 Inches of Blood, Blind Guardian or Ced Earth is always good listening! I listen to those bands all the time.

BBB: What 3 things, non art-related, could you absolutely not live without?

BM: Besides my CDs and my CD player, my smartphone, my heart shaped sunglasses are definitely key.

BBB: As an artist with undoubtedly a tremendous amount of work on his plate, what can readers and fans expect in the coming months from Buff Monster?

BM: Well I'm working on the second series of The Melty Misfits trading cards/stickers. Those will be out this summer. I have some more resin toys in the works. I also have some rad secret projects in the works. Best to follow me on social media to stay up to date. I'm @buffmonster on twitter and Instagram, and Buff Monster on Facebook.

WWW.BUFFMONSTER.COM







MURAL FESTIVAL

THE MURAL FESTIVAL WAS BACK FOR ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF THEIR STREET-ART AND GRAFFITI URBAN TAKEOVER OF MONTREAL. WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST IN LARGE-SCALE MURAL PAINTING FLASHING OFF THEIR SKILLS TO THE PEOPLE OF NOT ONLY QUEBEC BUT FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE WHO CAME TO WITNESS SOME OF THE MOST INCREDIBLE ART WORK REMOVED FROM THE GALLERY SPACE AND DISPLAYED TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC. KUDOS TO THE PEOPLE AND THE CITY OF MONTREAL.

**Photography by: Naz Goshtasbpour*

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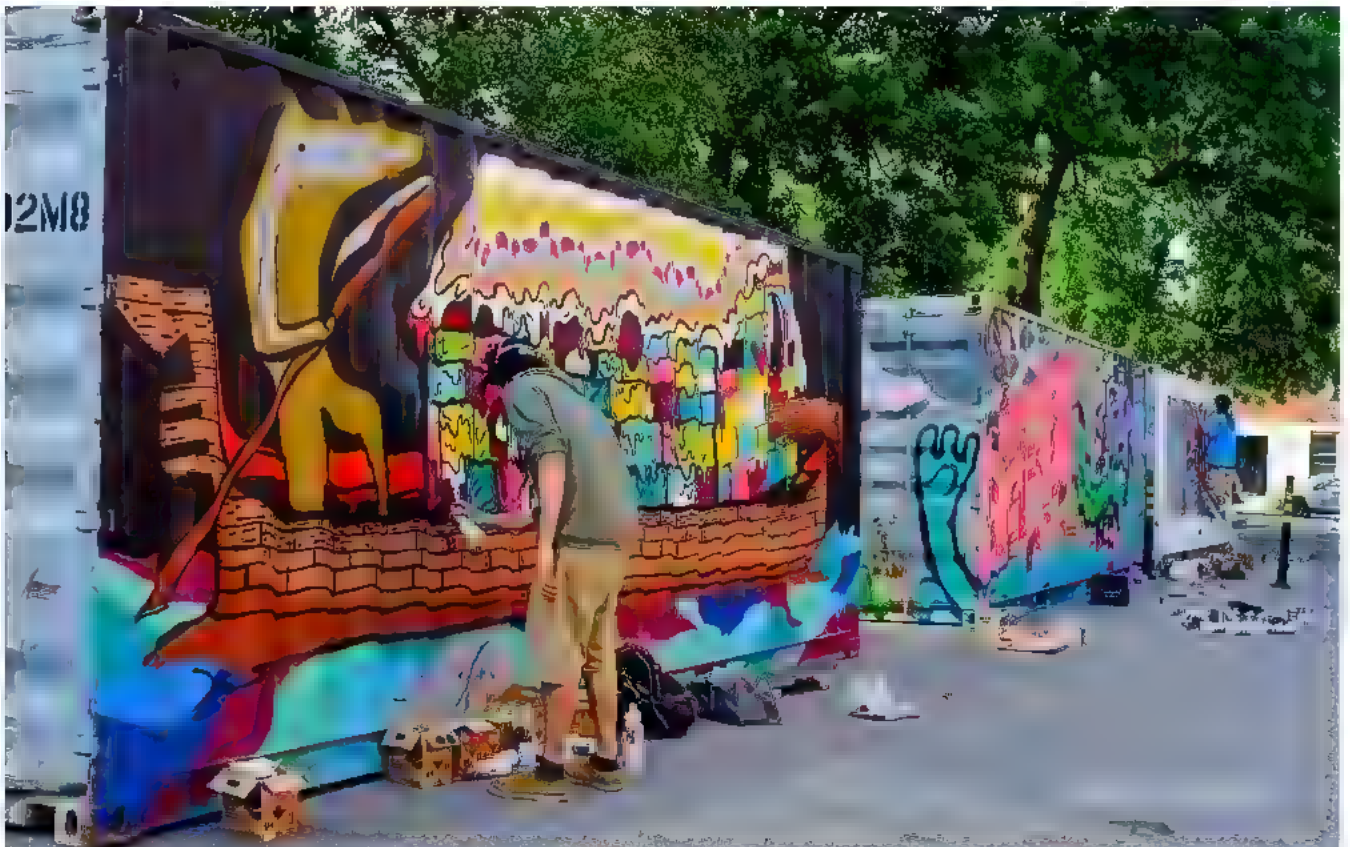






SCANNER











SETH GLOBEPAINTER







MONKE









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BizarreBeyondBelief: We've read your mother got you into graffiti, can you describe how that came about?

BATES: Stylewars documentary was coming on the tv, she woke me up and said: "you gotta watch this."

At that point i was into electric boogie, hoping we would see some glimpse of it on the screen.

Turned out it was more about the writing culture.

BBB: What was it your mother

described or showed you about the culture that persuaded you to take up painting?

BATES: Since i was a kid, i always liked to draw. When ever i got bored, i would lose my mind over drawings And forget about time. I simply loved to be creative and this has followed me up to being the adult i am now.

BBB: How has family played a role in not only the development of your graffiti, but also as an individual?

BATES: My mother always supported me when it comes to creativity, up to her very end.

I always kept her up to date and showed her my artwork. It was never a secret i was into being a writer and i painted graffiti

BBB: Growing up in denmark, what was the landscape like of graffiti when you first started to tag?

BATES: Nothing. You would see a few punk rock 'n' roll scribbles on the





“YOU GOTTA BE ABLE TO MASTER THEM ALL! HANDSTYLE TAGS
WITH CLASS THROW UPS WITH FLOW. PIECES THAT MOVES AND BURN.”





wall. If you were lucky you'd see an ørva character saying "I was here!" The early years, it was very humorist and innocent, yet it had a big impact. Seeing those early signatures and pieces in my neighbourhood.

BBB: How have you seen the scene and the culture there develop since you first started?

BATES: Those who where good, only lasted a few years, like about 3 years. So i believe i'm apart of the second

generation with a hand full of others who built the scene to what it is today. That's at least to say stylewise. This year it's my 30th year anniversary of painting. I been painting since 1984 and i've never taken a break. Just painted and painted! This has led me to where i am today!

BBB: How would you say the scene in denmark compares to that of other countries in europe and internationally?

BATES: I think we have a very strong scene. Denmark or more specifically copenhagen is a small city. But it has one of the longest lived train scenes. You can still catch trains running in traffic.

Today streets are smashed, rooftops are burning, trucks painted, throwups killed, legal walls, hall of fames rocked, train lines colorful and still a good amount of really talented upcoming writers, alongside a handful of style writers from the second generation!







Tobaksrygning
FORBUDT


dyrskue



Copenhagen is definitely on the map, lots of people like to come and visit. Just ask around!

BBB: Would you say there were more obstacles to achieve success in denmark than there would have been other countries such as france?

BATES: Denmark is so much smaller than france, but you need to put in hard work,dedication,sweat and tears to stand out! The competition is stiff these days. It's not a walk in the park and watch out for the cops.

BBB: As a well traveled artist, what cities would say are your favourite to visit, both graffiti wise but also architecturally and culturally?

BATES: Berlin, barcelona and warsaw. But brazil, asia and australia has interesting cultures and scenes as well.

BBB: Given the large range of graffiti aspects (tagging, bombing, piecing), if you had to choose just one to paint, which would you choose & why?

Bates: None, you gotta be able to master them all! Handstyle tags with class,throw ups with flow, pieces that moves and burn. Add some nice colorways and some characters and its a burner!

BBB: Can you describe what would a day in the life of bates would look like?

Bates: something graffiti related

BBB: What projects, events or any relevant information about you should our readers be on the look out for?

BATES: shifted gear lately, after being active in the streets for 30 years, traveled the world and met And painted with the best. I feel like i need a new challenge, so i have been staying busy in my studio, creating works that out ast me. You start to think "how much is left of all the things ive done, thousands of pieces, cleaned,buffed and painted over," If i'm lucky 5 percent is still up. Canvases stays so i feel its important to leave something behind and not go in circles, doing the same again and again! Keep an eye out for more upcoming exhibitions/shows.

WWW.GREATBATES.COM







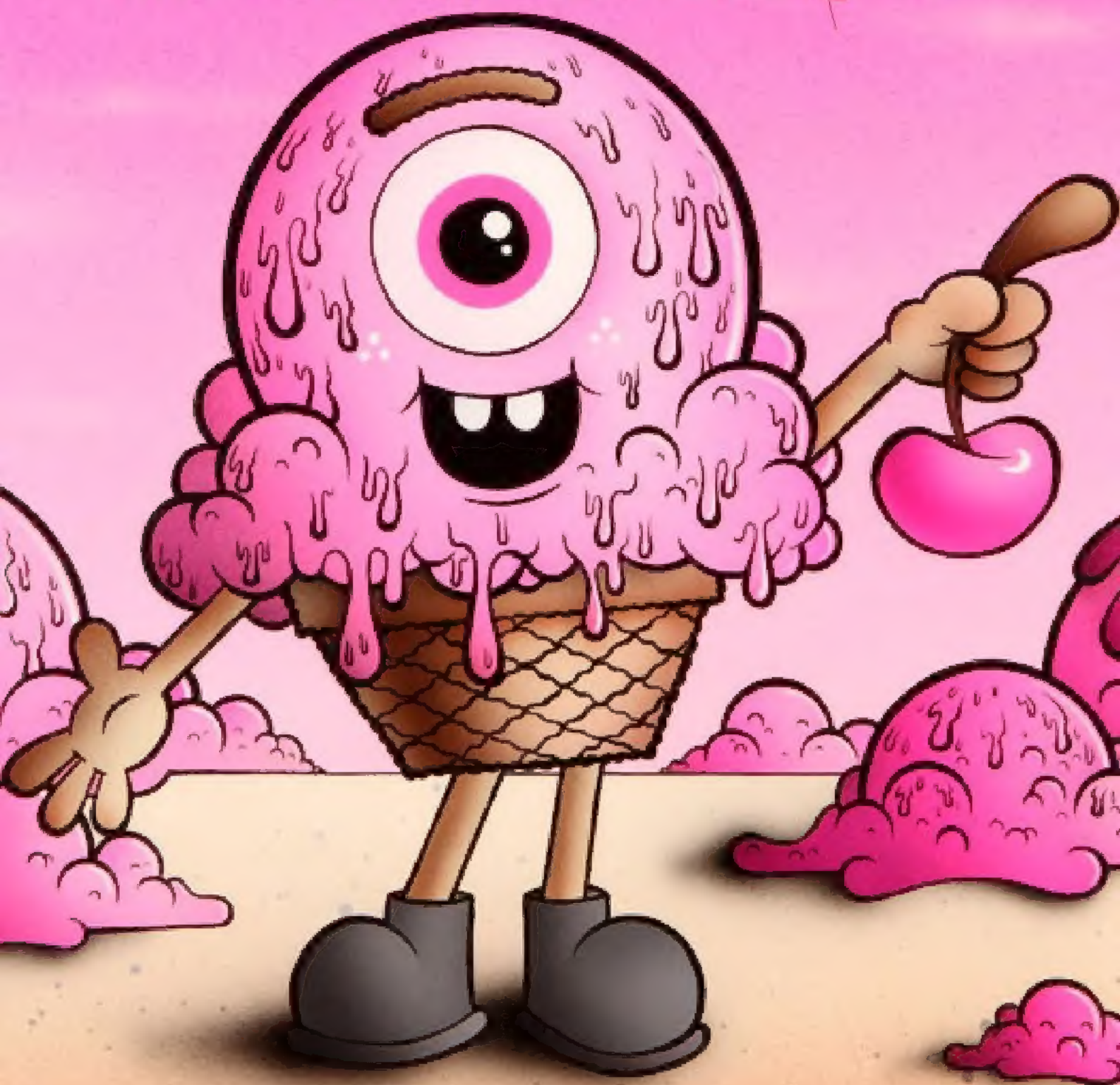
Stop Whining
Start Mining





BIZARRE BEYOND BELIEF

ARTS + CULTURE MAGAZINE  Issue #13



SIMON BIRCH | OMEN514 | BIAS | NYCHOS | BATES | BUFF MONSTER & MORE

